

COMMENTARY

THE DURABILITY OF SOVIET DESPOTISM

Forty Years of Revolution

BERTRAM D. WOLFE

AT EVERY turn the historian encounters the unpredictable: contingency; historical accident; biological accident intruding itself into history, as when the death of a history-making person brings a change of direction; changes of mood; emergence of new situations; sudden leaps that seem to turn an accretion of little events into a big one; the complicated interaction of multiple determinants on every event; the unintended consequences of intended actions.

Still, history is not so open that any event is just as likely as any other. As in the flux

of things we note continuing structures, as in biology we note heredity as well as variation and mutation, so in history there is an interrelation between continuity and change.

Though all lands go through a history, and all orders and institutions are subject to continuous modification and ultimate transformation, there are some social orders or systems that are more markedly dynamic, more open, more mutable, even self-transforming, while others exhibit marked staying powers, their main outlines continuing to be discernibly the same through the most varied vicissitudes.

It may be difficult to determine except in retrospect just when a system may be said to change in ways so fundamental as to signify its transformation; still, it is possible and necessary to distinguish between self-conserving and self-transforming systems, between relatively open and relatively closed societies, and between changes so clearly of a secondary order that they may be designated within-system changes, and those so clearly fundamental that they involve changes in the system or basic societal structure. That this distinction may in practice be hard to make, that there may be gradations and borderline cases and sudden surprises, does not relieve us of this obligation. Merely to reiterate endlessly that all things change, without attempting to make such

THE pertinence to current developments in Russia of BERTRAM D. WOLFE's observations on change and permanency in the Soviet totalitarian system needs no comment. Many readers, indeed, may think his essay was written after the Khrushchev purge; in fact, it was presented as the opening paper to the Conference on Changes in Soviet Society, held June 24-29 of this year, under the sponsorship of St. Antony's College, Oxford, in association with the Congress for Cultural Freedom. (In a companion article, Richard Lowenthal provides a detailed analysis of the current purge.) Mr. Wolfe, a regular contributor, is the author of the distinguished *Three Who Made a Revolution* (1948) as well as many other works. In 1956 he published *Khrushchev and Stalin's Ghost*, which followed his *Six Keys to the Soviet System* (1956).

distinctions, is to stand helpless before history-in-the-making, helpless to evaluate and helpless to react.

If we look at the Roman Empire, say from the time of Julius Caesar to the time of Julian the Apostate, or perhaps from Augustus to Romulus Augustulus, we can perceive that for three or four centuries, despite its many vicissitudes and changes, it continued in a meaningful and determinable sense to be the Roman Empire. In similar fashion we can easily select a good half millennium of continuity in the Byzantine Empire. Or if we take one of the most dynamic regions, Western Europe, in one of its more dynamic periods, we can note that monarchical absolutism had a continuity of several centuries. This is the more interesting because monarchical absolutism, though it was one of the more stable and monopolistically exclusive power systems of the modern Western world, was a *multi-centered system* in which the monarch was checked and limited by his need of support from groups, corporations, and interests that were organized independently of the central power: the castled, armed, and propertied nobility; the Church with its spiritual authority; the burghers of the wealthy, fortified towns.

IT is the presence of these independent centers of corporate organization that makes Western monarchical absolutism an exception among the centralized, long-lasting power systems. It was these limiting forces that managed to exact the charters and constitutions, the right to determine size and length of service of armed levies, size and purpose of monetary contributions, thus ultimately transforming the absolute monarchy into the limited, constitutional monarchy of modern times. And it is from our own Western history, with its exceptional evolution, that we derive many of our unconscious preconceptions as to the inevitability, sweep, and comparative ease of change. To correct our one-sided view it is necessary to compare the characteristics of multi-centered Western absolutism with

other, more "complete" and "perfected" forms of single-centered power and despotism.*

In the *samoderzhavie* of Muscovy we find a more truly single-centered power structure, stronger, more completely centralized, more monopolistic, more despotic, more unyielding in its rigid institutional framework than was the absolutism of Western Europe. The Czar early managed to subvert the independent boyars and substitute for them a state-service nobility. The crown possessed enormous crown lands and state serfs. Bondage, both to the state and to the state-service nobility, was instituted by the central power and adjusted to the purposes of the recruiting sergeant and the tax-gatherer. When the Emancipation came, in the 19th century, it was a state-decreed "revolution from above" (Alexander's own words for it), and carried with it state supervision and the decreeing of collective responsibility to the village *mir*.

To this universal state-service and state-bondage, we must add the features of Caesaro-papism: signifying a Czar and a state-dominated church. And the administrative-military nature of the Russian towns checked the rise of an independent burgher class.

Industrialization, too, was undertaken at the initiative of the state. From Peter I to Nicholas II, there were two centuries of state-ordained and -fostered industrialization; the state-owned and -managed basic industry—mining, metallurgy, munitions, railroad construction and operation—and some commercial monopolies, all crowned with a huge state banking and credit system.

The rudiments of a more multi-centered life were just beginning to develop in this

*This comparison is a central part of Karl A. Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (Yale, 1957). His attention is centered on the countries in which "the state became stronger than society" because of the need to undertake vast state irrigation and flood control works by *corvée* organization of the entire population, with the consequent assumption of enormous managerial functions. But his study is full of insights into modern, industry-based totalitarianism highly suggestive for the purposes of our theme.

powerful, single-center society when World War I added to the managerial state's concerns the total mobilization of men, money, materials, transport, and industry.

The "model" country in this new form of state enterprise was wartime Germany. The system of total management by the state for total war has been variously, but not very intelligibly, termed "state capitalism" and "state socialism." In any case, Lenin was quick to welcome this development as the "final transition form." In it, as in the heritage from the Czarist managerial autocratic state itself, he found much to build on in making his own transition to the new totalitarianism.

From Ivan the Terrible on, for a period of four centuries, "the state had been stronger than society" and had been ruled from a single center as a military, bureaucratic, managerial state. Amidst the most varied vicissitudes, including a time of troubles, wars, conquests, invasions, peasant insurrections, palace revolutions and revolutions from above, the powerful framework endured. Weakenings of the power structure, even breaches in it, were followed by a swift "restoration" of its basic outlines. When the strains of a world war finally caused its collapse, there came a brief interlude of loosening of the bonds. Then Lenin, even as he revolutionized, likewise "restored" much of the four-century-old heritage. Indeed, it was this "socialist restoration of autocracy" which Plekhanov had warned against, as early as the 1880's, as a danger inherent in the longed-for Russian revolution. He admonished the impatient Populists that unless all the bonds were first loosened and a free "Western" or "bourgeois-democratic" order were allowed to develop and mature, the seizure of power by would-be socialists could not but lead to a restoration of Oriental, autocratic despotism on a pseudo-socialist foundation with a pseudo-socialist "ruling caste." Things would be even worse, he warned Lenin in 1907, if this new "Inca ruling caste of Sons of the Sun" should make the fatal mistake of nationalizing the land, thus tightening even

more the chains that bound the peasant to the autocratic state.

THE term "Oriental despotism" applied to Russia in the course of this controversy among Russian socialists serves to remind us that there are yet more durable social formations with even greater built-in staying powers than those we have so far noted. These reckon their continuity not in centuries alone but even in millennia. As a Chinese historian once observed to me: "Your Renaissance was a fascinating period. We had seven of them." If we substitute restoration for renaissance, both in the sense of restoration of vigor and restoration of basic structure, he was right. For though China suffered upheavals, invasions, conquests, falls of dynasties, rebellions, interregnums, and times of trouble, a Chinese villager or a Chinese official of the 19th century, if transported to the China of two thousand or more years ago, would have found himself in a familiar institutional and ideological environment.

With the exception of Western monarchical absolutism, what all these enduring social structures had in common was a single power center, a managerial state, a lack of independent social orders and forms of property, an absence of checks on the flow of power to the center and the top, and an overwhelmingly powerful, self-perpetuating institutional framework.

Modern totalitarianism, I believe, is one of these comparatively closed and conservative societies, with a powerful and self-perpetuating institutional framework calculated to assimilate the changes which it intends and those which are forced upon it, in such fashion that—barring explosion from within or battering down from without—they tend to remain *within-system* changes in an enduring system.

At first glance the word conservative may seem out of place in speaking of a society that is organized revolution. And indeed there is a striking difference between Communist totalitarianism and all previous systems of absolute, despotic, undivided (and,

in that sense, total) power. For whereas despotism, autocracy, and absolutism were bent on preserving the status quo, Communist totalitarianism is dedicated to "the future." This powerful institutional structure which tolerates no rival centers of organization has a vested interest in keeping things in flux. The omnipotence of state and ideology is maintained by carrying on a permanent revolution. Like Alexander's, it is a revolution from above. But unlike Alexander's, its aim is nothing less than to keep a society atomized and to create, as rapidly and as completely as the recalcitrant human material and the refractory surrounding world will permit, a new man, a new society, and a new world.

LIKE the earlier systems referred to, it possesses a state that is stronger than society. Like them it represents a system of total, in the sense of undivided, power. Like them it lacks any organized and institutionalized checks on the flow of power to the top. Like them, it possesses a state-centered, state-dominated, state-managed, and, for the first time, a completely state-owned economy.

But if the other societies are distinguished by the high specific gravity of state ownership, state control, and state managerial function within the total activity of society, under Communist totalitarianism state ownership and state managerialism aspire to be total in a new sense. In the other cases, we have been contemplating total power in the sense of undivided power: power without significant rival centers of organization. But now, to the concept of *undivided power*, we must add that of *all-embracing power*.

No longer does the state limit itself to being "stronger than society." It now strives to be *coextensive* with society. Whereas the earlier power systems recognized certain limitations on their capacity to run everything, leaving room, for example, for pocket-handkerchief farms and the self-feeding of the *corvée* population, for private arts and crafts unconnected with the managerial concerns of the state, for certain types of private trade, and even finding room for village

communal democracy under the watchful eye of the state overseer—what Wittfogel has aptly called "beggars' democracy"—the new totalitarianism strives to atomize society completely, to coordinate the dispersed villages into its centralized power system, to eliminate even the small private parcel of the *kolkhoznik*, already reduced from a "pocket handkerchief" to a mere swatch.

For the first time a total-power system in the earlier sense of undivided and unchallenged power aspires to be totalist or totalitarian in the further sense of converting the state-stronger-than-society into the state-coextensive-with-society.

We cannot deduce much from a comparison with other modern totalitarianisms. For historical and physical reasons Italian Fascism was more totalist in aspiration than in realization. And, though Nazism and Stalinist Communism suggestively moved towards each other, Nazism did not last long enough to complete its evolution. But it did live long enough to dispose of certain illusions concerning the supposed incompatibility of totalitarianism with certain aspects of modern life.

Thus it is widely held that the monopoly of total power and the attempt to embrace the totality of social life and activity are incompatible with the complexity of modern industry and advanced technology. But Germany adopted totalitarianism when it was the foremost country of Europe in industry and technology.

Indeed, it is precisely modern technology, with its all-embracing means of communication, its high-speed transmission of commands and reports and armed force to any point in a country, its mass-communication and mass-conditioning techniques and the like, which for the first time makes it possible for total (undivided) power to aspire to be totalist (all-embracing) power. That is what Herzen foreboded when he wrote: "Some day J inghis Khan will return with the telegraph." If total power tends to arise wherever the state is stronger than society, totalitarian power can aspire to prevail over a great area and in great depth only where

the state is both stronger than society and in possession of all the resources of modern technology.

Closely akin to the illusion of the incompatibility of totalitarianism with modern technology is the view that totalitarianism is "in the long run" incompatible with universal literacy, with advanced technological training, and with widespread higher or secondary-school education. Once more it is Germany that serves to remind us that one of the most highly literate and technologically trained peoples in the history of man adopted totalitarianism. Nay more, modern totalitarianism *requires* that everybody be able to read so that all can be made to read the same thing at the same moment. Not the ability to read, but the ability to choose between alternative types of reading, is a potential—and only a potential—liberating influence.

II

WHEN Stalin died in 1953, Bolshevism was fifty years old. Its distinctive views on organization, centralization, and the guardianship or dictatorship of a vanguard or elite date from Lenin's programmatic writings of 1902 (*Where to Begin; What Is to Be Done?*). His separate party machine, which he controlled with an authoritarian hand, dates from the Bolshevik-Menshevik split of 1903 in the Russian Social Democratic party.

During these fifty years Bolshevism had had only two authoritative leaders, each of whom set the stamp of his personality upon it. Lenin, as we have suggested, inherited much from Czarist autocracy, yet his totalitarianism is different in principle from the old Muscovite despotism. He regarded himself as an orthodox Marxist, building upon and enlarging some aspects of Marx's conceptions while ignoring, altering, or misrepresenting others. His Marxism was so different from Marx's that a not unfriendly commentator, Charles Rappoport, called it *Marxisme à la Tartare*. Stalin's Leninism, in turn, differed enough from Lenin's that we might term it *Marxisme à la mode cau-*

casienne. Yet there is discernibly more continuity between Stalin and Lenin than between Lenin and Marx. The changes Stalin introduced involved the continuation and enlargement of certain elements in Lenin's methods and conceptions, along with the alteration of others. He inherited and used, now in Leninist, now in his own "Stalinist" fashion, an institutional framework involving a party machine, a state machine, a doctrine of infallibility, an ideology, and the determination to extend the totalization of power, to transform the Russian into the "New Communist Man," and win the world for Communism.

With Stalin's death, once more there are new leaders or a new leader. It is impossible to believe that this new personal imprint will not make alterations in Stalinism as Stalin did in Leninism.

But it seems to me useful, after four years of unsystematic talk about changes, that we should remind ourselves that the "new men" are not so new, that they have inherited a going concern, and that actually we are confronting changes within a single-centered, closed, highly centralized society run by a power that is both undivided and all-embracing. And we should remind ourselves, too, that such societies as I have classed it with have tended to exhibit built-in staying powers and a perdurability despite changes like the death of a despot, an oligarchical interregnum, or a struggle for succession.

These "new men" are, of course, Stalin's men. They would not now have any claim to power over a great nation were it not that they managed to be the surviving close lieutenants at the moment of Stalin's death. It is my impression that they are smallish men. There is a principle of selection in personal despotisms which surrounds the despot with courtiers, sycophants, executants, and rules out original and challenging minds. This almost guarantees a crisis of succession where there is no system of legitimacy, until a new dictator emerges. Moreover, the heirs are no longer young (Khrushchev is sixty-three), so that a fresh crisis of succession may well supervene be-

fore the present muted and restricted crisis is over.

I would not write these "smallish men" too small, however, for when you have a sixth of the earth, 200,000,000 population, and a total state economy and a great empire to practice on, you learn other trades besides that of courtier or faction lieutenant. Even so, not one of them at present exhibits the originality and the high charge of energy and intellect that characterized Lenin, or the grosser but no less original demonic force of Stalin.

WHENEVER a despot dies, there is a universal expectation of change. The new men have had to take account of it, and have taken advantage of it to introduce changes which the old tyrant made seem desirable even to his lieutenants: they have taken advantage of the expectation of change to rationalize elements of a system which has no organized, independent forces which might change it from below, and to make limited concessions while they are consolidating their power. But the institutional framework they have inherited is one they intend to maintain.

Some parts of this power machine are now more than a half century old, others date from 1917, others from the consolidation of the Stalinist regime in industry, agriculture, politics, and culture in the 30's. But even these last have been established for more than two decades.

What the epigoni have inherited is no small heritage: a completely atomized society*; a monolithic, monopolistic party; a single-party state; a regime of absolute force supplemented by persuasion or by continuous psychological warfare upon its people; a managerial bureaucracy accustomed to execute orders (with a little elbow room for regularized evasion); a centrally managed, totally state-owned and state-regulated economy including farms, factories, banks, trans-

port and communications, and all trade domestic and foreign; an established dogmatic priority for the branches of industry which underlie the power of the state; a bare subsistence economy for the bulk of the producers; a completely statized and "collectivized" agriculture which, though it has never solved the problem of productivity, threatens to reduce even the small parcel to a mere "garden adornment"; a powerful, if one-sided, forced tempo industry centralized even beyond the point of rationality from the standpoint of totalitarianism itself; the techniques and momentum of a succession of Five Year Plans of which the present is the sixth; a completely managed and controlled culture (except for the most secret recesses of the spirit which even modern technology cannot reach); a monopoly of all the means of expression and communication; a state-owned system of "criticism"; an infallible doctrine stemming from infallible authorities, interpreted and applied by an infallible party led by an infallible leader or a clique of infallible leaders, in any case by an infallible "summit"; a method of advance by zigzags toward basically unchanging goals; a system of promotion, demotion, correction of error, modification of strategy and tactics and elimination of difference by fiat from the summit, implemented by purges of varying scope and intensity; a commitment to continuing revolution from above until the Soviet subject has been remade according to the blueprint of the men in the Kremlin and until Communism has won the world.

It is in this heritage that these men were formed. In this they believe. It is the weight and power and internal dynamics of this heritage that in part inhibit, in part shape such changes as these men undertake, and enter as a powerful influence into the changes which they make involuntarily.

It would require a separate study to attempt an inquiry into what is fundamental to totalitarianism, so that a change in it would represent a "change in the system," and what is of a more superficial order, so that a change may readily be recognized as

*This does not apply to the Soviet empire but only to the Soviet Union. In general I have omitted any consideration of the empire here.

a "within-system" change.* Here we shall have to limit ourselves to a glance at a few post-Stalin political developments. The first change that obtrudes itself is "collective leadership."

THE party statutes do not provide for an authoritative leader, a dictator or *vozhd*. Just as this, the most centralized great power, still professes to be federal, a mere union of autonomous republics, so the party statutes have always proclaimed party democracy and collective leadership.

It was not hard to predict that Stalin's orphaned heirs would proclaim a collective leadership at the moment of his death, even as they began the maneuvers that led to the emergence of a still narrower ruling group (triumvirate, duumvirate) and a muted struggle for the succession. Stalin, too, for a half decade found it necessary to proclaim a collective leadership and pose as its faithful wheelhorse, and took a full decade before he killed his first rivals.

Stalin's successors had the same reasons as he for proclaiming the collective leadership of the Politburo, and some additional ones as well. The harrowing and demoralizing experiences of the 30's, the signs of the beginnings of a new mass purge (in the "poison doctors' case") a few months before Stalin's death, the terror that gripped even his closest collaborators, and their justified fears of each other—all combined to make necessary the proclamation of a "collective leadership."

There is nothing inherently incompatible with total, undivided power, nor with totalitarian, all-embracing power, in the rule of an oligarchy, or in an interregnum between dictators or despots. What is noteworthy here is the swiftness with which the first

triumvirate (Malenkov, Molotov, Beria) were demoted, compelled to confess unfitness, and, in the case of Beria, killed. It took Stalin ten years to shed the blood of potential rivals or aspirants to power; Beria disappeared in a few months. In less than two years the skeptical were obliged to recognize that Khrushchev was "more equal than the others" and was making all the important programmatic declarations.† Those who follow the Soviet press can perceive that Khrushchev is already the *Khozyain* (Boss), though not yet the *Vozhd* (Führer, Duce, Charismatic Leader).

This is not to say that Khrushchev must necessarily emerge as the undisputed and authoritative leader in the sense that either Stalin or Lenin was. Combinations and counter-forces in the oligarchy and limitations in his own capacity may check or slow or, in view of his age, even nullify the manifest trend. But triumvirates, duumvirates, directories are notoriously transitional in the succession to a despot where there is no legitimacy in providing a successor, and no checks against the flow of power to the top. Moreover, the whole dynamics of dictatorship calls for a personal dictator, authoritarianism for an authority, infallible doctrine for an infallible interpreter, totally militarized life for a supreme commander, and centralized, undivided, all-embracing, and "messianic" power for a "charismatic" symbol and tenant of authority. Unless the "collective leadership" should broaden instead of narrowing as it already has, unless power should flood down into the basic units of the party (which was not the case even in Lenin's day), and then leak out into self-organizing corporate bodies independent of the state, restoring some initiative to society as against the state—in short, unless the whole trend of totalitarianism is not merely slowed (as may be expected during an interregnum) but actually reversed, there is good reason to regard a "directory" or a "duumvirate" as transitory.

†For a time Bulganin made the "purely" economic pronouncements, but that period seems to have ended with the Twentieth Congress.

*At the Oxford Conference to which this paper was presented, Leonard Schapiro offered a brief and simple criterion of distinction between within system-changes and changes in the system. He said: "Any changes which leave undisturbed the monopoly of power by the party and its leaders may be regarded as a 'within-system' change. Any firm limitation upon this monopoly of power would represent a 'change-in-the-system.'"

Both purge and terror were instituted by Lenin and "perfected" and "over-perfected" by Stalin. Leaving on one side the purely personal element (paranoia and relish for vengeance), both purge in the party and terror in society as a whole serve many of the "rational" purposes of the totalitarian regime: the establishment of the infallibility of the party, of its summit, and its doctrine; the maintenance of the party in a "state of grace" (zeal, doctrinal purity, fanatical devotion, discipline, subordination, total mobilization); the atomization of society as a whole; the breaking up of all non-state conformations and centers of solidarity; the turn-over in the elite, demotion of deadwood and promotion of new forces; the supplying of scapegoats for every error and for signaling a change of line; the maintenance of the priority of heavy industry, of forced savings for capital investment, of unquestioned command and relative efficiency in production, of "collectivization" in agriculture, of control in culture, and a number of similar objectives of the totalist state.

All of these institutions have been so well established that to a large extent they are now taken for granted. Stalin himself promised in 1939 that there would never again be a mass purge. Except in the case of the army and the Jewish writers, the purge became physically more moderate, until, with increasing marks of paranoia, Stalin gave every sign of opening another era of mass purge a few months before his death. The first thing the heirs did as they gathered round the corpse was to call off the purge, both because it had no "rational" purpose and because it had threatened to involve most of them.

BUT it would be a mistake to believe that the "moderated" purge can be dispensed with. In the preparation of the 20th Congress the heirs showed how well they had mastered the "Leninist norms," according to which every congress since the 10th had been prepared for by a prior purge of the party organization. All the regional secretaries and leading committees were "re-

newed," 37 per cent of those who attended the 19th Congress disappeared from public view, 44 per cent of the Central Committee failed to be elected as delegates or to be re-elected to the new Committee. All we can say is that the purge today resembles those of Stalin's "benign" periods or of Lenin's day. Yet the liquidation of Beria and at least twenty-five of his friends shows that the techniques of the blood purge have not been forgotten. That the party ranks breathe easier and are glad of the self-denying ordinance of the leaders in the struggle for position we do not doubt. But there is no evidence that the party ranks ordered this change, or could do so, or would venture to try.

The terror in society as a whole has also diminished. No longer are there such bloody tasks as forced collectivization to carry through. Habitual obedience, the amnesties and concessions of an interregnum, the shortage of manpower for industry, agriculture, and the army because of continued expansion, and the deficit of wartime births that should now have been reaching the labor age—these and many other things account for the fact that artists and writers, workmen and peasants and managers, do not at this moment feel that public reproof (which they are very quick indeed to heed) must necessarily be followed by incarceration in the concentration camp. In a time of manpower shortages, the fact that the concentration camp is the most wasteful and least productive way of exploiting manpower is especially felt. The camps are gentler now, yet they are there. Their size is shrinking, yet no one dares to propose their abolition or even to take public notice of them. Even as this paper is being prepared, at least one new class of young people, the rebellious student youth, is being moved in increasing numbers into the camps.

The police has been downgraded and, in a regime so in need of naked force, the army has been upgraded: i.e. given more internal political functions. The public prosecutors have been given more control of trials and

pre-trial inquisitions—like making the fox the guardian of the chicken coop. There are some other minor legal reforms. Above all there has been much fuss made about a promise to codify and regularize the laws.

This new code was begun in Stalin's last months. It was promised "within sixty days" by Lavrentii Beria when his star seemed in the ascendant. It has not been promulgated yet, four years after Stalin's and almost four years after Beria's death. Sight unseen, we can predict that the new code will not touch the foundations of the totalist state: it will not alter the subservience of courts and laws and prosecutors and judges and police to the will and purposes of the oligarchy or the single leader. It is necessary to remember that any total power, and *a fortiori* any totalist power, may obey its own laws whenever it suits it to do so without giving those laws power over itself or making them into limitations upon its powers. A power center that is both legislator and administrator and judge and enforcer and even self-pronounced infallible "critic" of its own acts, may declare any activity it pleases a crime. In the Soviet Union, even loyalty to the underlying principles on which the state itself was founded has been declared a degrading crime and punished with incredible cruelty. How easily this totalist state may set aside its laws and negate its most solemn and "binding" promises is evidenced anew—after the proclamation of "socialist legality"—by the sudden repudiation by the "workers' state" of the state debt owed to the workers themselves, without so much as the possibility of anybody making a murmur. The owners of the repudiated bonds, in which they had invested their now wiped out compulsory savings, were even obliged to hold meetings and pass resolutions in which to express their delight at being expropriated.

The longer such a regime endures the more it has need of regularization of the duties and expectations of its subjects, even as it keeps up undiminished its powers of sudden reversal and unpredictable and unlimited intervention. The only guarantee against a totally powerful state is the exis-

tence of non-state organizations capable of effective control of or effective pressure on the governmental power. Otherwise, to attempt to check, or limit, or even question is to invite the fury of exemplary punishment.

BETWIXT subject and subject [Locke wrote of the defenders of despotism], they will grant, there must be measures, laws and judgments for their mutual peace and security. But as for the ruler, he ought to be absolute, and is above all such circumstances; because he has the power to do more hurt and wrong, it is right when he does it. To ask how you may be guarded from harm or injury on that side . . . is the voice of faction and rebellion. . . . The very question can scarcely be borne. They are ready to tell you it deserves death only to ask after safety. . . ."

It is well for us to remember that the most despotic rulers have on occasion handed down elaborate law codes. The famous and in many ways justly admired Roman Code was compiled and proclaimed only after the emperor himself had become a god, no longer subject to question or limitation, only to worship. Though laws must multiply and be regularized so that the subjects may know what is expected of them and what they can count on in their relations with each other wherever the central power is unaffected, the lack of independent courts, of independent power groups or corporate bodies, of an independent press and public opinion, deprives these laws of any binding force upon the rulers. In Communist totalitarianism, the place of imperial divinity is taken by the infallibility of doctrine, the dogmatic untouchability of the dictatorship, the infallibility of the masters of the infallible doctrine, and by such spiritual demi-urges as "revolutionary consciousness," "historical necessity," and "the interests of the revolution and of the people." Those who know where History is going surely have the right and duty to see to it that she goes there.

"The scientific concept, dictatorship," Lenin reminds us with beautiful simplicity,

"means neither more nor less than unlimited power, resting directly on force, not limited by anything, not restricted by any laws or any absolute rules. Nothing else but that."

And to Commissar of Justice Kursky, when he was elaborating the first legal code, Lenin wrote:

"[My] draft is rough . . . but the basic thought, I hope, is clear: openly to set forth the proposition straightforward in principle and straightforward politically (and not merely in the narrow juridical sense) which motivates the *essence* and *justification* of terror, its necessity, its limits.

"The court should not eliminate the terror: to promise that would be either to deceive oneself or to deceive others, but should give it a foundation and a legalization in principle, clearly, without falsification and without embellishment. It is necessary to formulate it as broadly as possible, for only a revolutionary consciousness of justice and a revolutionary conscience will put conditions upon its application in practice, on a more or a less broad scale."

In these regards the new men do not have to "return to Leninist norms," for they have never been abandoned for a moment.

If we can hope for, even perhaps count on, the diminution of the apocalyptic element in the ideology of a going, long-lasting society, we must remind ourselves that Leninism was peculiar in that its central "ideas" were always ideas about organization, and they have been strengthened rather than weakened in the course of time.

Bolshevism was born in an organizational feud about the definition of a party member, and who should control a paper (*Iskra*) which should act both as guardian of the doctrine and organizational core of the party. "Give me an organization," Lenin wrote at the outset of his career as a Leninist, "and I will turn Russia upside down." The organization he wanted, he explained, must be one in which "bureaucratism" prevailed against "democratism," "centralism" against "autonomy," which "strives to go from the top downward, and defends the enlargement of the rights and plenary powers of the cen-

tral body against the parts." When at the 1903 Congress an exalter of the Central Committee urged that it should become the "omnipresent and one," the all-pervasive, all-informing and all-uniting "spirit," Lenin cried out from his seat: "*Ne dukh, a kulak!*" ("Not spirit, but fist!"). The idea of the rule of the elite, the idea of a vanguard party, the idea of the hatefulness of all other classes and the untrustworthiness of the working class, the idea that the working class too required a dictator or overseer to compel it to its mission—it is amazing to note that these "ideas" about organization form the very core of Leninism as a special ideology. Far from "eroding" or growing "weak" and merely "decorative," it is just precisely these structural principles which have grown and expanded, and become systematized.

Resentments, discontent, longing for a less oppressive regime and an easier lot exist under despotisms, autocracies, total-power states, and totalist states, even as in other social orders. Indeed, whenever hope or expectation stirs they are apt to become endemic and intense. The problem of "state-craft" in a despotism is that of preventing the discontent and longing from assuming *organized* form. Since the totalist state penetrates all social organizations and uses them as transmission belts (destroying whatever organization it cannot assimilate to its purposes and structure), it is particularly adapted to keeping discontent fragmented and unorganized.

By 1936, Lenin's central idea of an elite, single-centered dictatorship had gotten into the "most democratic constitution in the world" as Article 126, which proclaimed the party to be "the vanguard of the working people and the leading core of all organizations both social and state." And last summer, when Khrushchev and the rest were summing up the discussion over Stalin, they declared in *Pravda*: "As for our country, the Communist Party has been and will be the *only master of the minds, the thoughts, the only spokesman, leader and organizer of the people*" (my italics).

It is foolhardy to believe that they did not mean it, self-deluding to persuade ourselves that the forces pressing for concessions within the country are likely to find the road open to separate and effective corporate organization, which is the condition precedent to the development of a limited, multi-centered state and a society which is stronger than it.

Even before Stalin died, we got evidence that the spirit of man is wayward and not as easily subjected as his body—the mass desertions at the war's end; the escape of millions who "voted with their feet" against totalitarianism; the two out of three "Chinese volunteers" in the Korean prison camps who preferred exile under precarious and humiliating "displaced person" conditions to return to their native scenes and homes. Since Stalin's death there have been East Berlin and Pilsen, Poznan and Vorkuta, Warsaw and Budapest, to prove that men will sometimes stand up unarmed to tanks and cannon and machine guns. They have proved too that the armies of the conquered lands have never been the pliant instruments of the Kremlin that faint-hearted men thought they were.

We have seen that forty years of *Gleichschaltung*, corruption, and terror have not rooted out of the artist the ineradicable notion that sincerity to his creative vision is more to be desired than *partiinnost* and *idei-nost*. We have seen that the youth—although the faint-hearted had thought they would be turned off the conveyer-belt as "little monsters"—are born young still, and therefore plastic, receptive, questioning, capable of illusion and disillusion, of "youthful idealism" and doubt and rebellion. Now the expulsions among the university youth are for the first time providing a pariah elite as a possible leadership to future undergrounds which may form under even this most efficiently regimented of societies.

I have never for a moment ceased to cast about for grounds of hope: that weaker heirs might make less efficient use of the terrible engines of total power; that a struggle or series of struggles for the succession might

compel a contender to go outside the inner circles and summon social forces in the lower ranks of the party or outside of it into some sort of independent existence; that the army, disgraced as no other in all history by the charge that it gave birth to traitors by the thousands in its general staff, might develop sufficient independence from the party to make it a rival power center or an organized pressure body; that intellectuals, technicians, students might somehow break through the barriers that hinder the conversion of discontent into an organized, independent force.

BUT if I put the emphasis on the nature of the Soviet institutional framework and its built-in staying powers, it is by way of bending the stick in order to straighten it out. For the Western world has found it hard (or so it has seemed to me) to gaze straight and steadily at the head of Medusa, even if only in the reflecting shield of theoretical analysis. Brought up in a world of flux and openness, we find it hard to believe in the durability of despotic systems. Our hopes and longings are apt to betray us again and again into a readiness to be deceived by others or to deceive ourselves. And the "journalistic" nature of our culture has made us too ready to inflate the new because that alone is "news," while we neglect to put it into its tiresomely "repetitious" historical and institutional setting.

From the NEP to Socialism in One Country; from the Popular Front and Collective Security to the Grand Alliance and One World; from Peaceful Coexistence to the Geneva Spirit—the occupational hazard of the Western intellectual has been not to read too little but to read too much into planned changes, involuntary changes, and even into mere tactical maneuvers and verbal asseverations.

Each has been hailed in turn as the softening of the war of the totalist state on its own people and the world, as the long awaited "inevitable change" or "fundamental transformation"; "the sobering that comes from the responsibilities of power"; the "response to the pressure of the recognition of reality";

the growing modification of totalist power by "a rationalist technocracy"; the sobering "effect of privilege upon a new privileged class"; the "rise of a limited and traditionalist despotism"; a "feeling of responsibility to Russia as against World Revolution"; the "quiet digestion period of a sated beast of prey" no longer on the prowl; the "diffusion of authority which could lead to a constitutional despotism"; the "mellowing process that sooner or later overtakes all militant movements"; the second thoughts on the struggle for the world which have come at long last "from a recognition of the universal and mutual destructiveness of nuclear war"; the "inevitable work of erosion upon the totalitarian edifice." (Each of these expressions is quoted from some highly respected authority on Soviet affairs in the Anglo-Saxon world.)

Because of the nature of our mental climate and our longings, because too of the injection of "revolutionary methods" into diplomacy in a polarized and antagonistic world, the danger does not lie in a failure on our part to watch for change, nor in a failure to "test"—though generally without sufficient skepticism—the meaning of each verbal declaration. No, "the main danger," as the Communists would say, has not lain in insensitivity to hope, but in too ready self-deception.

When Hitler's attack on Russia threw Stalin into our camp during World War II,

I wrote an article, entitled "Stalin at the Peace Table," which contended that there would be no peace table and general settlement as after other wars, and that the peace would be settled piecemeal by the strategic acts of the war, so that, if the war were not planned accordingly, there would be no decent peace. The illusions of the Grand Alliance were such that this view could not get a hearing.

This is not surprising in the case of a Cassandra who is merely a cloistered writer on totalitarianism and Soviet affairs. But Winston Churchill, participating in the directing councils of the Grand Alliance, tried to get an agreement on a strategy for the joint occupation and liberation of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and even he could not prevail against the overpowering Grand Alliance illusions of wartime Britain and America. As a result, where the Soviet Army was in sole occupation, there are conquered countries. Where there was joint occupation, there is a divided Germany and a divided Korea. Where the Soviet Army was not admitted, there is a Japan free to criticize its occupier and remake its own destiny. Thus our trying to understand and estimate Soviet totalitarianism is no mere exercise in sociological abstraction or historical generalization. For literally every judgment about the nature of totalitarianism and the scope of the changes in it is fraught with significance for the fate of millions of men.